

A PROFILE OF
BATTERED WOMEN
WHO USE SHELTERS IN
ALBERTA

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This research report is based partly on data derived from the Women's Shelter Information System, an automated data base housed in the Department of Social Services of the Government of Alberta. The Department has worked closely with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters in the development of the Women's Shelter Information System and recognizes the importance of the role shelters play in the data collection process, as well as the delivery of services to thousands of battered women and children each year. Grateful acknowledgement is given to the many women admitted to shelters who agreed to share information about their lives.

A manual has been produced as a user guide to accompany the Information System which explains, in greater detail, the terms used, the conditions and methods of data collection, coding, and other procedures. More information about the System can be obtained from Carolyn Marshall, Program Manager for Women's Shelters, Office for the Prevention for Family Violence, Alberta Social Services, Edmonton, Alberta, (403) 422-5916.

NOTES ABOUT GRAPHS

Some of the graphs included in this report are based on the total number of women who responded to the question and not on the total number of battered women.

Please refer to the following list for the sample size and number of non-responses for each of those figures.

Figure 1: These figures are based on a total of 4,223 women; the 253 non-responses were not included in the calculation of percentages.

Figure 2: These figures are based on a total of 4,294 women; the 182 non-responses were not included in the calculation of percentages.

Figure 3: These figures are based on a total of 4,341 women; the 135 non-responses were not included in the calculation of percentages.

Figure 4: These figures are based on a total of 4,262 women; the 214 non-responses were not included in the calculation of percentages.

Figure 5: The figures are based on a total of 4,439 women; the 37 non-responses were not included in the calculation of percentages.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report is based on data derived from the Alberta Women's Shelter Information System which has been analyzed to produce a profile of battered women who stay in women's emergency shelters in Alberta. This data is based on self-reports by women in shelters. It is recorded on a standardized, pre-coded form by shelter staff during intake, interview and discharge processes.

The first section of the report includes a brief literature review of twenty articles and books which present Canadian, British, U.S. and international research on characteristics of battered women and general details about family violence.

The second section of the report presents a descriptive analysis of the data collected by the Alberta Women's Shelter Information System. This data includes information provided by Alberta's fourteen women's shelters and one second stage housing program; it covers the period from November, 1985, to October, 1987. During this time period, a total of 4,476 battered women who had a total of 8,446 dependent children were admitted to Alberta shelters.

The picture of Alberta's battered women who use shelters includes the following characteristics:

- the women are young, 29 years old;
- they live in the city of Edmonton or Calgary;*
- they are married or living common law;
- most work full-time in the home;
- they have 1-2 young children;
- their education is between grade 9 to 12;
- most have not been in the shelter in the previous two years;
- the women stay an average of 9.1 nights in the shelter;
- 75% of the women do not return to live with the batterer immediately after leaving the shelter;

- most of the women have been battered by their marital partner or boyfriend;
 - many of the women were abused during pregnancy;
 - the abused women have been in the relationship for an average of 6.3 years;
 - the women have experienced abuse for 1-5 years;
 - the women most often experienced psychological and physical abuse;
 - the women identified alcohol use by the batterer prior to the abusive event in three-fourths of the cases.
 - 48% of children of battered women were reported to have been abused.
- * (The largest number of shelter spaces are available in these two cities.)

This data base of 4,476 battered women and their 8,446 children makes it one of the largest, if not the largest, collections of data about battered women who use shelters. It is important to note that this data is not meant to generalize about all battered women in Alberta; it only describes those battered women who use shelters. Since this data is collected over a different time period and in a different form and manner than other research studies, it is difficult to make generalizations; comparing the data to other research.

However, several interesting facts emerge from the data. Although 62.3% of women in Alberta are in the work force, 72% of the battered women who use shelters work full-time in the home. This high representation of women who work full-time in the home probably indicates that these women have fewer resources and must turn to shelters for assistance. Alcohol use by the batterer is reported to be quite high in Alberta; 75 percent of batterers are reported to always or sometimes use alcohol or drugs prior to abuse. Also, 48% of the children of battered women were themselves abused; this has implications for the "intergenerational transfer" of violent behavior and the need for services to children of battered women. Finally, only 30% of Albertan battered women reported using the shelter in the previous two years. Previous shelter use in the 1987 MacLeod study was 67% for Canadian shelter clients, but it was not limited to a two year time period. Further research

would be useful to look at correlations between different variables to determine which factors affect the cycle of family violence.

This report is intended to assist Alberta shelter staff to both meet the needs of the battered women they serve, and to help Albertans in general continue to support and expand programs which help battered women and their children escape the cycle of violence.

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A PROFILE OF BATTERED WOMEN WHO USE SHELTERS IN ALBERTA

This research report is based on data derived from the Alberta Women's Shelter Information System which will be analyzed to produce a profile of battered women who stay in Alberta's shelters. In addition to demographic characteristics of shelter clients, information on the battering situation will also be presented. The literature on battered women and shelter clientele will be reviewed, followed by a descriptive analysis of Alberta statistics.

Canadian Data

Linda MacLeod (1980) surveyed 73 shelters or transition houses in Canada regarding the process of wife battering. She was unable to obtain data from such agencies as police departments, provincial family courts, social service offices, hospitals and children's aid society offices, because none of the agencies collected data on wife battering in any systematic way. MacLeod produced a statistic of the "average" battered Canadian woman who stayed in transition house in 1978. This profile portrayed the typical client as 28 years of age, married for 7 years, white, works in the home, has an annual family income of \$10,000, has left her husband once before, and has 1 or 2 young children. She was battered when pregnant, and has a Grade 11 education. Of the women who stayed in Canadian transition houses in 1978, 60 percent were 30 years old or younger, 62.3 percent were married and 24.2 percent lived common-law. The average length of the marital relationship was between 5-8 years. Only 22 percent of the women were employed outside the home. Previous separations had occurred for 56 percent of the women.

Data regarding the battering situations (collected from eight houses), indicated that 31 percent of the transition house residents were beaten weekly or daily, and 26 percent were beaten at least once a month. One of the transition houses reported that 84 percent of its residents had been beaten at least eleven times. In about 1/3 of the cases, medical treatment was required and received. Battering was often found to occur during pregnancy. The men

had abused alcohol in over 50 percent of the cases. Thirty-six percent of the women and 56 percent of the men had been beaten in childhood. MacLeod estimated that 1 in 10 Canadian women, or 50,000 women are battered each year in Canada.

MacLeod (1987) produced a second study of wife battering in 1987, based on a survey of 159 transition houses in Canada and other agencies that work with battered women. MacLeod cautioned that transition houses represent only a small portion of all battered women in Canada. Women who use transition houses are generally women with young children and few financial resources; 70 percent were 34 years old or younger, and 70 percent of women brought children. Most of these children were young; 52 percent were under 5 years old; 32 percent were between 5 and 10 years old; and 16 percent were between 11-18 years old.

Of the 74 transition houses that kept statistics on child abuse as it relates to wife abuse, 26 percent of the children had been abused physically by the partner, 48 percent of the children had been abused emotionally, and 7 percent of the children had been abused sexually.

Fifty percent of the women were married, and 28 percent were living common-law. The average length of the relationship was between 1-5 years for 34 percent, between 6-10 years for 33 percent, and more than 10 years for 23 percent. Approximately 75 percent of the women and children were living in poverty. Only 20 percent of the women worked outside their homes. Educational levels were low; 70 percent of the women had not completed high school, 22 percent had high school diplomas, 6 percent had college or technical school, and 2 percent had university degrees. These figures underscore the difficulties those women experience when they consider leaving their abusive partners. Sixty-seven percent of the women had stayed in the transition house previously.

These statistics do not give a complete picture of wife battering in Canada. MacLeod indicated that because primarily poorer women come to shelters, we do not know much about wife abuse in moderate or upper income families. One

shelter indicated that middle class and upper middle class women phoned the shelters for information, advice and telephone counselling.

Barnsley (1980) surveyed 148 women residents of Vancouver Transition House. The women's ages ranged from 17 to 56 years, with most women in their 20's and 30's. Seventy percent of the women were married, and 30 percent were in common-law relationships. The length of relationship ranged from a few months to 40 years. Forty-eight percent of the women had been in the relationship for 5 years or less, 24 percent for 6 to 10 years, and 23 percent for more than 10 years. Eight of the women had been in the relationship for 25 or more years. Sixty-four percent brought children. Over half (62 percent) of the children were 5 years old and under, and ages ranged from 6 weeks to 16 years of age.

With respect to the education levels of these women, it was found that 10 percent were university educated, 60 percent had completed high school, 32 percent had not completed high school, 11 percent had grade school only, and 3 percent had no formal education. Only 14 percent were employed and the sole supporter of family, 30 percent were dependant on their spouse, and 26 percent listed Social Services as their income source. The remaining women listed a variety of other income sources, such as Unemployment Insurance, part-time work, pensions, etc., and nine women reported no financial resources at all. The length of stay ranged from 1 to 83 days. Forty-two percent stayed for 3 days or less, 58 percent stayed for one week or less, and 18 percent stayed for one day.

In the description of the battering situation, 79 women reported both physical and psychological abuse; 18 women reported physical abuse only; 26 reported psychological abuse only, including threats; and 27 of the women who reported battering and psychological abuse also reported forced sexual activity, including rape. Of the 84 women who responded to the question about medical treatment, 61.9 percent had received medical treatment. Of 89 women who reported when the physical assaults began, 45 percent indicated the abuse was at or near the start of their relationship. Of the 85 women who indicated frequency of assaults, 62.3 percent were beaten often or regularly.

Twenty-two percent of the women spontaneously mentioned alcohol abuse as a factor in their assaults.

MacEachern, Adler & Roland studied family violence in Hamilton, Ontario. The sample of 476 cases was obtained from the police, the court and other social agencies that deal with family violence victims during a six month period in 1980. Data collected from three women's hostels indicated that 75 percent of the 144 victims of family violence were under 35 years of age. Fifty-nine percent were married, 17 percent were in common-law relationships, and 21 percent were separated. Eighty-four percent had children, and 23 percent had 3 or more children. The length of the relationship was 36 percent for 5 years or less, and 23 percent for longer than 16 years. Use of alcohol by offenders was reported as 29 percent. Physical abuse was reported by 80.6 percent, verbal abuse by 11.1 percent, sexual abuse in by 3.5 percent, and physical with a weapon by 4.9 percent. Approximately 37 percent were financially dependent on their spouse, 29 percent were on welfare, and 21 percent support themselves by working. Physical abuse was mainly directed at the wives; only 8.6 percent of children were also abused.

Data collected from the police files indicated that 42 percent of the complainants were women, and 67 percent of the complainants were age of 35 years or less. The police files indicated that 42 percent were married, 22 percent were common law, and 31 percent were separated. Approximately 62.3 percent had one or more children, and the length of the relationship was 70.4 percent for 0-5 years, 11.1 percent for 6-10 years, 10.7 percent for 11-20 years, and 8 percent for 20 years or more. Alcohol use by the offender was involved in only 15 percent of the disputes. Physical abuse was reported in 67.9 percent of the cases, verbal abuse in 25.6 percent, sexual abuse in .8 percent, and physical abuse with a weapon in 5.5 percent of cases, including "watch and beset" in .2 percent of cases. This report concluded that more services need to be provided for the women victims of family violence in the Hamilton area.

In her review of family violence in Canada for the Canadian Association of Social Workers, *Paltiel (1981)* quotes from an analysis of clientele of Quebec shelters. The study revealed that "57.1 percent of women were under 35 years,

about half had some secondary education, over 10 percent had some college or university, two-thirds had no personal income, two-fifths were housewives, 3.8 percent were professionals, only 17.5 were employed outside the home and about one-third were on social welfare" (Paltiel, 1981: 65). The Quebec researchers indicated that the main differences between the clientele versus the general population included over-representation of persons on welfare and under-representation of upper income levels. It was suggested that women who had some income could better hide their problems from public knowledge by using a hotel or other such accommodation. Almost 60 percent of the women had children from 0 to 6 years, while less than 1/5 had children 13 to 17 years old. Paltiel observed that most battered wives are housewives, with young children or employed in unskilled jobs. Paltiel also quotes a Toronto study of abused women who were receiving services; it found that the majority of women were in their thirties and most were mothers.

Dyck interviewed 44 former clients of WIN House, an Edmonton shelter, in 1979-1980. Demographic characteristics include a mean age of 29.76 years, (range of 18 - 41 years), with 83.7 percent age 35 or less. Marital status included 74.5 percent, married, and 19.4 percent, common-law. The marital relationship length was 1-5 years for 46.8 percent of women, 6-10 years for 34 percent, and for 11 years or more for 19.2 percent. Education levels were grade 9 or less for 22.4 percent, some high school for 34.7 percent, high school for 18.4 percent, some university or technical school for 20.4 percent and university graduates for 4.1 percent. Sixty-seven percent were dependent on their husband's income, 14.3 percent were on social assistance, 12.2 percent were employed, 4.1 percent listed none, and 2.0 percent other. Most of the women had children; 83.7 percent had 1-3 children, and the average age of the children was 5.97 years.

Fifty-three percent of the women had experienced physical abuse in the past, and 69.4 percent were experiencing it at present; 75.5 percent had experienced threats of abuse. Forty-two and one half percent indicated abuse was alcohol or drug related, and 19.1 percent indicated both drugs and alcohol were related to the abuse. The children experienced physical abuse in 20.4 percent of cases in the past, and 32.7 percent at present time of interview.

In summary, most of the Canadian studies indicate that a profile of battered women would include the following characteristics:

- Is 35 years or younger, with average age usually around 28-30.
- Is married to or living common-law with a partner who experienced family violence in his childhood.
- Is likely to be at home with 2 or more young children.
- Has few financial resources.
- Has close to a high school education.
- Has been married for 5 years or less.
- Has experienced abuse during pregnancy.
- Has experienced physical abuse, with verbal abuse secondly most common.
- Has experienced physical abuse for five years or less.
- Has experienced alcohol use by partner as part of abusive incident.
- Is less likely than abuser to have experienced violence in childhood.
- Has left spouse at least once before.

None of these characteristics, by themselves, is predictive of wife abuse. Rather, this profile presents a descriptive analysis of wife abuse victims. The background and characteristics of the male abusive partner are more predictive of abuse than the background and characteristics of the abused women.

Literature Review: U.S. Data

Pagelow (1981) surveyed women in women's shelters and several agencies that help battered women. Demographic characteristics indicated the women's mean age was 29.91, and ranged from 17 to 68. One third of the women were employed; one third had not been employed in the past year, and 27 percent had not been employed for two years or had never been employed. Over 80 percent of the women were legally married to their batterers, while 20 percent were not, and 1 percent were battered by male relatives. Pagelow's research

supports the cycle of violence theory; she found a correlation between violent childhoods and male batterers.

Gelles' (1980) review of research in the seventies indicated a relationship between family violence and such stress factors as unemployment or part-time employment of males, financial problems and pregnancy. Social isolation was found to increase the risk of severe violence between spouses. The "cycle of violence factor" suggests that those who have experienced abusive and violent childhoods are more likely to become spouse abusers as adults (*Gelles, 1980: 878*). Low socio-economic status has been found to indicate a greater prevalence of family violence. However, *Gelles* pointed out that domestic violence occurs in families across the entire spectrum of socio-economic status. Also, *Gelles* reported that other factors such as low job satisfaction of the husband, husbands with no religious affiliation, and alcohol problems are related factors in wife abuse.

Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) surveyed the incidence of family violence in 2,143 families in the United States. They found that violent assaults took place at a yearly rate of 38 per 1,000 married women, or when applied to the U.S. as a whole, approximately 1.8 million wives in the U.S. in total. The mean number of beatings per year was 8. Characteristics of the husband that were found to be important in wife abuse were: husband is dominant in family decisions; wife is a full-time housewife; and wife is very worried about economic security (p. 204). A twenty-five point scale was developed of indicators of family violence, and it was found that 12 to 13 of the indicators must be present before the items correlated with the family violence potential of the batterer. Although the survey indicated that women had a similar rate of violence, much of the violence was in the form of self defense or retaliation. Also, the researchers pointed out that when men's greater size and muscular development, as well as the economic dependence of wives on their husbands is taken into account, wives are mainly the victims, rather than the perpetrators of marital violence.

In a later study, *Gelles and Cornell (1985)* noted that marital violence occurred most frequently among those under thirty years of age. In addition, *Gelles and Cornell* summarized factors which related to family violence such as

the link between alcohol and violence; a higher risk of wife abuse in newer marriages; and relationship factors such as power imbalance or status inconsistency or incompatibility between husband and wife. Social stress and social isolation were two additional factors related to wife abuse.

In addition to the above factors, *Straus (1983)* cited male dominance in the family, and in society in general, as an important causal factor in wife battering. Despite the trend to more equality between marriage partners, many husbands still demand to be regarded as head of the household and to have the final say in decisions. The fact that women employed full-time only earn 59 percent of salaries paid to men also reinforces men's dominant role in families and society.

Walker (1984) surveyed 400 battered women who were former shelter clients in the Colorado-Rocky Mountain region. In general, Walker found that the battered women in her sample were similar in psychosocial characteristics to the general population from which they were selected in all categories for which comparison data was available.

Twenty-four percent of the women were married or living with partners, and 65 percent were separated or divorced. Forty-eight percent of the women were unemployed, while 37 percent were employed full-time. The average years of education of the women were 12.7 years, with 40 percent having some college, and 23 percent having college and post-graduate work. The average age of the women was 32.2 years, with an age range of 18-59 years. The average number of children per family was 1.5 and ranged from 0 to 10 children. The family background of the women indicated that battering was present in 67 percent of the battered women's childhood homes, and in 81 percent of the battering men's homes. The women reported that 48 percent had been sexually abused as children.

In terms of the battering situation, Walker reported that 67 percent of batterers abused alcohol. Women were at high risk of battering during pregnancy; 59 percent of the women were battered during the first to third pregnancies. The women had threatened suicide in 36 percent of cases. The couples had been married for 6 years in 82 percent of cases. The batterer had

also abused the children in 53 percent of cases and threatened to abuse the children in 33 percent of cases. Walker found that less than 15 percent of batterers were unemployed, which indicated no direct link between unemployment and violent behavior for the sample. In addition, Walker reported that the data did not support Straus's, Gelles and Steinmetz's (1980) observation of mutual combat between partners. Walker contends that women's violent actions are mainly in defense after men have attacked them, and that their actions are generally not effective in stopping or hurting the men.

Roy (1982) reported on a trend analysis based on 4000 cases of spouse abuse in New York City and area. The partners were married in 66.2 percent of the cases. The victims were 26-35 years of age in 46 percent of the cases, and under 25 years of age in 23.5 percent of the cases. The children's ages included 7 percent under 1 year; 38.9 percent, 1-5 years; 31.2 percent, 5-12 years; and 22.9 percent, 13 years and older. The relationship duration was 45.9 percent, 0-5 years; 27 percent, 6-10 years; 14.2 percent, 11-15 years; 8.7 percent, 16-25 years; and 4.2 percent, 26 years or longer.

In the analysis of the battering situation, Roy indicated that 60.8 percent report physical abuse, 19 percent report verbal abuse, 18 percent report physical abuse with a weapon, and 2.2 percent report sexual abuse. Victims report that 51 percent of abusers have drug and alcohol problems. In over 70 percent of the sample, violence occurred early in the relationship. Roy confirms other studies that report a higher percent of abusers (81 percent) come from violent homes than do victims (33.3 percent).

Stacey and Sharpe (1983) studied 542 abused women in shelters in Texas. Demographic characteristics indicated an average age of 25. Most women brought at least 2 young children with them; many were pregnant with another child. The majority, 72 percent, were married. The education of residents was 39 percent high school; 56 percent, high school and some college; 5 percent, college and above. The employment profile indicated that 56 percent were unemployed/homemakers; 25 percent were skilled labour or clerical, and 11 percent were unskilled labour. Economically, women were lower-middle or lower class. Almost half of the women worked outside the home but earned less than \$10,000. The researchers suggested that this low

socio-economic status reflects the fact that these women have fewer options and must depend on public facilities like shelters. Stacey and Sharpe observed that "childhood exposure to violence had no detectable effect on those women who experienced it, and most did not." (Stacey and Sharpe, 1983: 45).

The average age of the children in violent homes was 5.75 years; 15 percent were 1 year old or less; 36 percent were 2-5 years old; 33 percent were 6-9 years old; 22 percent were 10-12 years; and 12 percent were 12 and over. Children experienced physical abuse or serious neglect in 45 percent of cases. (This rate is 1500 percent higher than national averages for families in the general U.S. population).

Giles-Sims (1983) reported on the characteristics of 31 battered women in a study which focused on the process of wife battering. Sixty-one percent of the women were married; 26 percent were cohabiting; 6.5 percent were separated; and 6.5 percent were divorced. The average length of the relationship was 5.7 years. The women's average was 29.1, and they had an average of 2.5 children. The women's education levels indicated that 23 percent had some high school, 39 percent were high school graduates, and 28 percent had some college or special training, 6 percent had 8 years or less, and 3 percent were unknown. Thirty-five percent of women were employed. The women in study had low incomes and high unemployment. The women had experienced family violence in their childhood in 48 percent of cases, and men in 71 percent of cases. Alcohol and drug use was reported as a problem for men in 72 percent of cases. Although a small sample, Giles-Sims findings are similar to other studies.

Bowker (1983) studied Milwaukee women who had successfully overcome wife abuse in the past. Ninety-four percent of the couples were married. Twenty-two percent of the women were homemakers, 22 percent were service workers, 20 percent were clerical, and 14 percent were professionals or managers. The average age of battered women was 38; 27 percent were age 30 or younger, 16 percent were over 50 years old. They had an average of 2.1 children with former batterers. Bowker found that correlations between demographic characteristics and dimensions of marital violence are generally

low. For example, wife beating was not found to be more frequent and severe in families with a low socio-economic status than in families with a middle or upper socio-economic status. However, because the sample was recruited from volunteers, it does not represent a random sample.

British Data

Dobash & Dobash interviewed 109 battered women who had used refuges for battered women in Scotland. Their ages ranged from the late teens to early sixties, and the majority were between the ages of 21 and 30. The majority had two or three children and were from rural and urban backgrounds. Seventy-seven percent experienced violence after marriage, and 23 percent experienced violence during courtship. The majority of the women, 84 percent, experienced violence in the first to the third years of marriage. Forty-one percent of the women and seventy-one percent of the men experienced childhood violence.

Dobash and Dobash (1979) include historical, social and psychological analyses to support their view that the root problem of wife beating is male domination of women. They argue that only in the successful struggle against the patriarchal organization of society will wife beating stop.

Gayford's London survey of 100 wives, cited in Battered Wives (Del Martin, 1975) included women who had used the battered women's shelters. Consequently, most were women who were without financial resources to choose other options for assistance. The women were married in 85 percent of the cases, and 15 percent were living out of wedlock. Their ages ranged from 19 to 59. The length of the relationship and the period that the women were battered ranged from 1 to 55 years. All of the women had been physically abused.

The women had a total of 315 children. Fifty percent of the women had attempted suicide. All but 79 percent had left their husbands on one or more occasions. In 54 percent of the cases, violence had extended to the children. Twenty-three percent of the women had experienced violence in their family background. Education levels included 27 percent with grade school education,

32 percent with a high school diploma, and 30 percent with some college or higher education. Gayford concluded his study by observing that most of the women had been trapped in violent marriages and had few options to get out of their situation.

Borkowski, Murch and Walker (1983) surveyed agencies in the Bristol, England area. Women were victims in 94 percent of the cases. Most were women in their late 20's and early 30's. The women were married in 82 percent of cases, and most cases of abuse were in the first 10 years of marriage. Approximately 50 percent of the couples had children under 5 years of age. Most women were homemakers, and the social economic status of family was not known. Although data showed some bias towards lower socio-economic categories, this probably reflects source referring agencies (i.e. Social Services Department). Borkowski found that, in general, little demographic information was routinely collected about cases involving marital violence.

International Data

Gelles and Cornell (1983) reported on international research regarding factors associated with spouse abuse. Other countries have found, like the U.S., that abuse is common in lower class households (but does occur across socio-economic spectrum). Pregnant women are more vulnerable to abuse, and an intergenerational transmission of violence seems to exist. A major deviation from U.S. data was that social class was not related to spousal violence in Japan. European and African studies emphasize the role of cultural factors. For example, Misharga, a researcher working on wife abuse in East Central Africa, reports that cultures which discourage wife abuse also have a low rate of homicide. In general, Gelles & Cornell conclude that "there is much less written outside of the United States on spouse abuse than on child abuse ... no extensive literature exists on spouse abuse in countries other than the United States and Great Britain." (Gelles and Cornell, 1983: p. 3). Problems with methodology and the definition of family violence limit our knowledge about the similarities and differences among factors related to spouse violence in different cultures.

PART II: DATA FROM ALBERTA WOMEN'S
EMERGENCY SHELTER INFORMATION SYSTEM

In this section of the report, a demographic profile of abused women will be presented, including details of the abusive situation. The statistics used are derived from the Women's Emergency Shelter Information System which includes 14 women's shelters and one second stage housing program. During the time period of November, 1985 to October, 1987, 4,476 battered women were admitted to Alberta shelters, many with their children. The total of 4,476 women includes clients who used the shelter more than once. They also had children who did not come with them to the shelter.

This data is based on self-reports by women in shelters; it is recorded on a standardized, pre-coded form by shelter staff during intake, interview and discharge processes (see Appendix A, page 34).

Demographic Profile

The majority of women who use Alberta shelters are young women; 77.5% are 35 years or less. The average age is 28.87 years. This finding is similar to other research studies which indicate that the majority of abused women who use shelters are 35 years old or younger.

TABLE I
Women's Ages

AGE (years)	TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN	PERCENT
(did not answer)	144	2.4
16-25	2,335	39.0
26-35	2,299	38.5
36-45	771	12.9
46-55	205	3.4
56-65	94	1.6
over 65	81	1.4

Based on regional boundaries defined by Alberta Social Services, Edmonton and Calgary were the home region for 48.7 % of the women; the Northwest and Northeast accounted for 19.4%, Central Alberta for 10.8%, South for 11.4%, and 8.9% were from out of province. This is not surprising given that 50.7% of the shelter bed spaces are located in the Edmonton and Calgary regions. The map in Appendix B indicates Social Services regions and shelter sites within the province.

TABLE II
Women's Home Region

WOMEN'S HOME REGION*	NUMBER	PERCENT
No Answer	38	0.8
Northwest	473	10.6
Northeast	393	8.8
Edmonton	1,248	27.9
Central	483	10.8
Calgary	932	20.8
South	512	11.4
Out of Province	397	8.9

* Based on regional boundaries defined by Alberta Social Services.

The majority of the women, 69%, lived in a city, while 14% lived in towns, and the remaining women lived in a variety of other locations. These figures are based on a total of 4,223 women; the 253 "no answers" were not included in the calculation of percentages. Figure 1 illustrates the areas in which the women reside.

These percentages may reflect availability of the shelters, rather than actual percentages of abused women in each region. Rural and isolated areas do not provide women easy access to shelters and shelter services and information.

The majority of the women were married, 50.7%, or living common-law, 37%, while 4.9% were separated or living apart, 2% were divorced, 4.8% were single, .3% were widowed, and .3% did not answer the question. Most studies indicate a similar percentage distribution for marital relationships.

Most of the women worked full-time in the home, 72%, while 14% worked full-time outside the home, and 9% worked part-time, in addition to 5% attending school full or part-time. These figures are based on a total of 4,294 women; the 182 "no answers" were not included in the calculation of percentages. This compares to the Statistics Canada provincial figure of 62.3% participation rate of women in the labour force. Figure 2 illustrates the abused women's employment status.

Of the women who were not earning a wage, 65.2% were either dependent on spouse's income (29%) or on social allowance (38%). These figures are based on a total of 4,341 women; the 135 "no answers" were not included in the calculation of percentages. Figure 3 indicates the battered women's sources of income.

The women's education levels ranged from grade one elementary to a university degree. The majority, 83%, had grade 1-13; 4% had trades training, and 2% had a college diploma, 2% had a university degree, 3% had some university, and 5% had some college. These figures are based on a total of 4,262 women; the 214 "no answers" were not included in the calculation of percentages. Figure 4 illustrates the education levels of shelter clients.

The women had 8,446 dependent children between the ages of 1 to 18. Shelter clients brought from 1 to 7 children with them to the shelters for a total of 6,599; 29.5% had 1-2 admitted children; 48.5% had 3 or more admitted children; 5% had 4-7 admitted children; and 22.3% had no admitted children (1.5% did not respond to the question). The average number of children admitted with the women was 1.98, with a range of 1-7 children.

In addition, the women had 1,847 children between the ages of 1 and 18 whom they did not bring with them to the shelter. Twenty percent of the clients had 1-2 non-admitted children; 5.4% had 3 or more non-admitted children; and 69.8 percent had no non-admitted children (4.2% did not complete the question). The average number of dependent children who did not accompany their mothers to the shelter was 1.85, with a range of 1-9 children.

The ages of the admitted children, and the non-admitted children are summarized in the following table:

TABLE III
Ages of Children

AGES	ADMITTED CHILDREN		NON-ADMITTED CHILDREN	
	Number N = 6,599	Percent	Number N = 1,847	Percent
1-11 months	819	12.4	56	3.1
1-5 years	3,258	49.4	503	27.2
6-12 years	2,043	31.0	644	34.9
13-17 years	458	6.9	507	27.4
18+ years	21	.3	78	4.2
No answer	-	-	59	3.2

On average, battered women admitted to the shelter had dependent children who were 5.9 years of age. The majority of the children are age 1 month to 5 years, which reflects the client's younger average age of 29 years.

Seventy percent of the women had not been previously admitted to the shelter in the last two years. Table IV summarizes this data.

TABLE IV
Previous Admissions

PREVIOUS ADMISSIONS	Number	Percent
No answer	54	1.2
No previous admission in last 2 years	3,155	70.5
Previous admission	1,267	28.3

Of the 1,267 women who had been previously admitted, 57.7% had been admitted once; 23.2% had been admitted twice; 10.3% for three times; and 8.8% had been admitted from 4-12 times (1.2% did not complete the question). It is interesting to note that Macleod's study of 159 Canadian transition houses found that 67 percent of the women had used shelters previously, while 70 percent of Alberta women reported they had not used the shelter in the previous two years. Table V illustrates the number of previous admissions.

TABLE V
Number of Previous Admissions

PREVIOUS ADMISSIONS	Number	Percent
Admitted once	731	57.7
Admitted twice	294	23.2
Admitted 3 times	130	10.3
Admitted 4-12 times	112	8.8

The women's stay in the shelters averages 9.1 nights (excluding second stage housing), and ranged from 1 to 92 nights. The majority, 76%, of the women

stayed for 1 to 14 nights; 19% stayed for 15-29 nights, and 4 percent stayed for 30 nights and over (1% did not complete the question).

The departure status data indicated that 24% returned to their spouse; 13% returned home without their spouse; 24% chose independent living; 20% were living with friends or relatives; 8% was unknown; and 11% had other destinations. The figures are based on a total of 4,439 women; the 37 "no answers" were not included in the calculation of percentages. Figure 5 illustrates the departure status.

There were 4,476 battered women who stayed in Alberta shelters from November 1985 to October 1987. Fifty-three percent of the women had been battered by their husbands; 1.5% by their ex-husbands; 34.4% by their live-in partner or common-law spouse; and 4% by their boyfriends. Thus, 92.9% of the women were battered by their marital partner or boyfriend. The following Table VI illustrates the batterer's relationship to the shelter clients.

TABLE VI
Relationship of Batterer to Abused Women

TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN	BATTERER	PERCENT
216	no answer	4.8
2,358	husband	52.7
68	ex-husband	1.5
4	child	.1
52	other relative	1.1
1,539	live in partner/ common-law	34.4
177	boyfriend	4.0
34	other	.8
13	both husband & child	.3
15	husband and other relative	.3

The average number of previous separations from the abuser because of battering was 4.8. Twenty-two percent of the women had no previous separations, 41% had 1-3 separations, 21.8% had 4-10 separations, and 4.4% had 11-99 separations (10.8% did not complete the question).

Table VII summarizes the women's response to the question of whether they had been assaulted during pregnancy.

TABLE VII
Incidence of Assaults During Pregnancy

	N = (4476)	PERCENT
Did Not Answer	624	14
Was Assaulted During Pregnancy	1,884	42
Was Not Assaulted During Pregnancy	1,513	34
Not Applicable	455	10

Excluding the 455 women for whom the question is not applicable, that is, the women were never pregnant, 46.9% of the women had been assaulted during pregnancy, and 37.6% had not; 15.5% of this total did not complete the question. (See Table VIII.) This incidence of battering during pregnancy is similar to other studies that report battered women are often abused during pregnancy.

TABLE VIII
Incidence of Assaults During Pregnancy
Excluding Never Pregnant Women

	N = (4423)	PERCENT
Did Not Answer	624	15.5
Was Assaulted During Pregnancy	1,886	46.9
Was Not Assaulted During Pregnancy	1,513	37.6

In terms of their emotional support network, the abused women considered friends, 61.5%, family, 54.4%, counsellors, 28.1%, doctors, 26.7%, and clergy, 11.5%, as part of their support network. (The women may have answered more than once.)

In the previous six months, 29.5% of the abused women had thought of harming themselves, and 8% had attempted to harm themselves. For this question, category #3, "no answer" was a viable response to the question. (See Table IX.)

TABLE IX
Harmful Thoughts/Actions

Harmful Thoughts			Harmful Actions		
Response	Total	Percent	Response	Total	Percent
Did not complete question	336	7.5	Did not complete question	332	7.4
Yes	1,318	29.5	Yes	356	8
No	2,185	48.8	No	3,136	70
No Answer	637	14.2	No Answer	652	14.6

The abused women most often told friends, 60.7%, and family, 58.6%, that they were being abused. Among professionals, the counsellors, 31.4%; the doctors, 30.8%; and social service personnel, 29.4%, were most often told about the abuse. Table X illustrates who women told about their abuse. They may have answered more than one category.

TABLE X
Who Women Told About Abuse

WHO WOMEN TOLD ABOUT ABUSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Friends	2,716	60.7
Family	2,623	58.6
Counsellor	1,406	31.4
Doctor	1,377	30.8
Social Services Personnel	1,314	29.4
Nurse	486	10.9
Clergy	458	10.2
Mental Health Worker	431	9.6
Psychiatrist, Psychologist	405	9
Community Health Nurse	210	4.7
Paramedic	92	2.1

Similarly, the abused women were most often asked by their family, 32.7% or friends, 31.8%, if they were being battered. The professionals who most often asked if the women were being abused were the doctors, 18.4%, the counsellors, 17.9%, and social services personnel, 13.3%. (The women may have selected more than one category.)

TABLE XI
People Who Asked If Women Were Being Abused

PEOPLE WHO ASKED IF WOMAN WAS BEING ABUSED	NUMBER	PERCENT
Family	1,462	32.7
Friends	1,422	31.8
Doctor	822	18.4
Counsellor	803	17.9
Social Services Personnel	595	13.3
Nurse	325	7.3
Psychiatrist, Psychologist	244	5.5
Mental Health Worker	228	5.1
Clergy	173	3.9
Community Health Nurse	124	2.8
Paramedic	70	1.6

While medical attention was required for 39.3% of the women, it was not required for 40% of the abused women. A fairly high percentage, 20.7% did not answer the question, so making generalizations based on these percentages is difficult.

TABLE XII
Medical Attention Required

MEDICAL ATTENTION REQUIRED	NUMBER	PERCENT
No Answer	926	20.7
Not Required	1,790	40
1 - 3 times	1,455	32.6
4 - 99 times	305	6.7

The abused women had been in the relationship for an average of 7.3 years, with a range of 1 to 50 years. Abuse occurred in the first 1-5 years for 42.2% of the women, and in the 6th to 10th year for 22.7% of the women. The following table illustrates the length of the relationships.

TABLE XIII
Length of Relationship

LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP	NUMBER OF WOMEN	PERCENT
No Answer	570	12.7
1-2 years	741	16.6
3-5 years	1,147	25.6
6-10 years	1,015	22.7
11-20 years	669	14.9
20-50 years	334	7.5

Of the 4,476 women, 334 women reported the relationship had been going on for less than one year.

Abuse was present in the relationship for an average of 6.3 years, with a range of 1 to 65 years. Most of the women, 46.5%, had experienced abuse for 1-5 years; 18.5% had experienced abuse for 6-10 years; and 12.5% had experienced abuse for 11-65 years. Table XIV illustrates the years of abuse.

TABLE XIV
Years of Abuse

YEARS OF ABUSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
No Answer	712	15.9
0 years	294	6.6
1 - 5 years	2,085	46.5
6 - 10 years	827	18.5
11 - 65 years	558	12.5

Abuse was present in the relationship for less than a year for 590 women.

The two most common types of abuse were psychological abuse, 89.6% and physical abuse, 87.4%. Table XV illustrates the five types of abuse and the percentage of yes answers. (Each woman could respond to more than one type of abuse.)

TABLE XV
Type of Abuse

TYPE OF ABUSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Physical Abuse	3,914	87.4
Sexual Abuse	1,418	31.7
Psychological Abuse	4,009	89.6
Abuse or Threats of Abuse to Children	1,760	39.3
Destruction of Property or Pets	2,356	52.6

The frequency of abuse by type is illustrated by Figure 6.

Psychological abuse was reported to be the most frequent abuse; 58% of the women reported daily abuse. The largest percentage of women reported physical abuse to be erratic, 43%, although 22% reported daily or weekly abuse. Sexual abuse was daily or weekly for 11.6% of the women, and sexual abuse was erratic for 14.3% of the women. Abuse or threats of abuse to the children were daily or weekly occurrences for 16% of the women and was erratic for 17.4% of the women. Destruction of property or pets was daily or weekly for 8.8% of the women and abuse was erratic for 32.4% of the women.

Most of the women had been abused with a fist or hand, 84.8%, or had been kicked, 52.5%. Table XVI illustrates the objects and/or weapons used. (Women may have answered more than one category.)

TABLE XVI
Weapons Used for Abuse

WEAPONS USED	NUMBER	PERCENT
Fist or Hand	3,796	84.8
Knife or Sharp Object	846	18.9
Belt or Rope	504	11.3
Kick	2,351	52.5
Other Weapon	963	21.5

Alcohol or drugs were reported to have been always used by the abuser prior to the abuse in 37.6% of the cases, and sometimes in 38.2% of the cases. In contrast, the abused women reported they always used alcohol or drugs prior to the abuse in only 2.4% of the cases, and sometimes in 41.9% of the cases. This question refers to the period of time just prior to the abuse. These figures do not suggest a causal relationship between the drinking or drug behavior and the abusive behavior. Alcohol may be used by the batterer to reduce inhibitions to allow physical violence. The abused women may use alcohol as a coping mechanism prior to abuse. Use of alcohol by the batterer in other studies previously ranged from a low of 29 percent in the Hamilton study, to 52 percent in MacLeod's 1987 study, to a high of 67 percent in Walker's study. Thus, Alberta's figure of 75.8 percent who always or sometimes use alcohol or drugs prior to abuse is a fairly high figure.

The incident that the largest percentage of women feel provoked the abuse was jealousy, 58%, followed by husband feeling wife did not meet his expectations, 54.5%, and financial or money disputes, 53%. (See Table XVII.)

TABLE XVII
"Triggers" of Abuse

WHAT TRIGGERS ABUSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Perceived Jealousy	2,605	58.0%
Husband Feels Wife Does Not Meet His Expectations of Good Wife	2,440	54.5%
Financial Problems or Money Disputes	2,365	52.8%
Job or Business Pressure	1,795	40.0%
Extended Family Pressures	1,831	41.0%
Disputes Over Care and Needs of Children	1,860	41.6%
Women Views Self as Provoking Abuse	1,215	27.0%
Unknown	1,081	24.0%
Other	713	16.0%

It is important to note that these "triggers" are not considered to be causal factors of the abuse. This question is important to assist counsellors in understanding the women's perceptions of what sets off the immediate abuse situation, but these triggers are not meant to be considered as valid "causes" for the abuse.

The abused women witnessed violence between their parents in 36.5% of cases. They were abused as children in 34.2% of cases. The type of abuse of the woman as a child by relationship to the abuser is illustrated in Figure 7.

Of the six categories of abuser reported, "mother", "father", "both father and mother", "other relative", "other", and "unknown", the father was listed as the most frequent abuser.

In addition, a total of 4,025 (48%) children of the battered women were themselves abused. A total of 3,303 children who were admitted with their mother to the shelter were abused. Figure 8 illustrates the admitted child abuse by relationship to the abuser.

A total of 722 children who were not brought with their mother to the shelter were abused. Figure 9 indicates their relationship to the abuser. (The child abuse figures are based on self-reports by the battered women, and/or by observations by shelter staff.)

As the graphs indicate (Figures 8 and 9), "psychological abuse" was the most common form of abuse and was most often committed by the father; it occurred for 2,417 (36.2%) of the admitted children and for 479 (25.9%) of the non-admitted children. The next most common form of abuse was "threats of abuse" by the father; it occurred for 1865 (28.3%) of the admitted children, and for 418 (22.6%) of the non-admitted children. "Physical abuse" by the batterer was the next most common type of abuse; it occurred for 1,450 (22%) of the admitted children and for 303 (16.4%) of the non-admitted children. Sexual abuse was the least reported form of abuse; it did not occur for 5,163 (78.2%) of the admitted children and for 1,299 (70.3%) of the non-admitted children. The sexual abuse category had the largest percentages of "unknown" answers; 17.2% for admitted children and 23.4% for non-admitted children, so it is difficult to generalize based on these figures.

It should be noted that the reports of abuse by the mother were 2 percent or less for all categories of abuse. This compares to MacLeod's 1987 study in which shelter workers estimated that 8 percent of the battered women had physically abused their children; 3 percent emotionally; and 1 percent sexually. It should be noted MacLeod also reported that 69 percent of women who physically abused their children had also been abused as children. These figures were not intended to further criticize or blame these battered women, but to reflect the possible social costs of wife battering for the affected families and for society in general.

When the figure of 48 percent of children abused is compared to other studies, it should be noted that this figure includes four types of abuse. Other

studies reported a range of 8.6 percent children physically abused in the Hamilton study, to 20.4 percent in the WIN House study, to 26% of children in MacLeod's study, to a high of 53% in Walker's study, compared to Alberta's figure of 24.7% rate of physical abuse.

A picture of Alberta's battered women who use shelters emerges from the data:

- the women are young, 29 years old;
- they live in the city of Edmonton or Calgary;*
- they are married or living common law;
- most work full-time in the home;
- they have 1-2 young children;
- their education is between grade 9 to 12;
- most have not been in the shelter in the previous two years;
- the women stay an average of 9.1 nights in the shelter;
- 75% of the women do not return to live with the batterer immediately after leaving the shelter;
- most of the women have been battered by their marital partner or boyfriend;
- many of the women were abused during pregnancy;
- the abused women have been in the relationship for an average of 6.3 years;
- the women have experienced abuse for 1-5 years;
- the women most often experienced psychological and physical abuse;
- the women identified alcohol use by the batterer prior to the abusive event in three-fourths of the cases.
- 48% of children of battered women were reported to have been abused.

* (The largest number of shelter spaces are available in these two cities.)

In conclusion, the battered women who use Alberta shelters are similar in many characteristics to battered women profiled in other research studies. However, much of the data reported here is not available in other studies or is not in comparable form. This report is intended to assist Alberta shelter staff to better meet the needs of the battered women they serve, and to help

Albertans in general continue to support and expand programs which help battered women and their children escape the cycle of violence.

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APPENDIX A

Data Collection Instrument

APPENDIX B

Alberta Social Services Regions and
Shelter Sites Throughout
the Province